

Archiving History in Washington, D.C.

By Cathy Kay

During the week of March 16-21, 2005 members of Professor Michael Meyer's History 646 graduate seminar class traveled to Washington for research at the National Archives, the National Holocaust Museum, and the Library of Congress. The student researchers included



Anne Clara Schenderlein and Daniella Hovsepian

Devin Engelbretsen, Gilli Halaby, Daniella Hovsepian, Cathy Kay, Anne Clara Schenderlein, Linda Steen, Kathryn Taylor, Victor Varadi and Vivian Barbedian. It was a journey of both exploration and education as Dr. Meyer introduced us to a new city and new venues where we would perform our research. We met with representatives from the research institutions, enjoyed sightseeing trips to the national monuments, and engaged in exciting research in primary historical records.

Student's work days were filled with sifting through photographs, albums, microfilm, text and documents detailing the arduous task of De-Nazification in post-war Germany by Allied forces. So



De-briefing at the end of the research day.

much documentation exists regarding "Holocaust Era Assets" that the finding guide to this treasure trove of information is over 1100 pages in length. More than 55,000 photographs exist within the National Archives along, which detail the U.S. Office of the Signal Corps' efforts to document Nazi Holocaust policies.

We started our research with a shuttle bus ride on Thursday to the National Archives Repository located in College Park, Maryland, for an orientation meeting with WWII specialist, Dr. Amy Schmidt who told us that "less is more" when performing research, to narrow the focus of our topics to maximize the value of our research time within NARA. Vivian and Victor followed her advice as they spent quite a bit of time gathering information from microfilm within the Ardelia Hall Collection. Later that day, we journeyed over to the Holocaust Memorial Museum and met with a panel of experts. Text, document, photographic and tech staff members gave us thumbnail sketches about the various museum departments available to us. Gilli found much information about her topics, Adolf Eichmann, and Linda discovered a wealth of documentation about resistance fighters. The museum has an extensive digital collection and has included materials from CSUN's Community Relations Committee Collection.

On Friday we moved on to the Library of Congress for an introduction from Dr. Davis Morris, the German Area Specialist. I worked in the Photographic Reading Room and found a wealth of political cartoons and Nazi photo albums given to the library by the U.S.

Army as part of its de-Nazification efforts. Anne hit pay dirt in the second floor Law Library for her thesis research about the efforts of the Los Angeles Jewish Club of 1933 to help German-Jewish refugees in the United States.

On Saturday, Devin arose early and jogged down to the Holocaust Museum to garner free exhibition tickets for our group. We walked through the bustling weekend activities on the Mall to the Museum and spent nearly three hours at the museum. The exhibit shocked and gave the observer pause for reflection. There were many people in the crowd sniffing and dabbing at their eyes. Many of the group returned to the museum on Sunday to catch up on our reading.

On Monday morning we returned to NARA to spend another day in research. By this time, many strangers on the shuttle bus were familiar with the CSUN researchers and we discussed our various topics with them. The route wends its way through Washington, past Catholic University and through wooded suburbs.

Daniella met with Amy Schmidt, one of the archivists who assisted us on our projects. Amy quickly enabled Daniella to obtain documents about anti-Semitism from Group 260, which contained documents from the OMGUS social and religious branch. Daniella enjoyed getting her own cart loaded with boxes of files and commenced research at a table with Vivian and Devin. After locating great informa-

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tion in the morning, Daniella requested a second cart for the afternoon. She commenced research on another cart and found many reports from generals on the situation including a booklet of over 30 pages on anti-Semitism. She found 20 more separate files with some having statistics and some just mentioning anti-Semitism as a problem with examples such as the desecration of cemeteries and slander in newspapers. "Since the day went by so fast for me, I rushed the last few hours ... [but] it was a great working day though. We accomplished a lot," Daniella recalled as she pointed to Victor stretched out on the locker room floor at the end of the day.

A special treat awaited us on Monday at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation offices in the person of Dr. Ken McDonald, the Oxford-educated former chief historian at the CIA who had presided over declassification of CIA documents in the Cold War era. Ken McDonald talked to us about the war-time OSS and its post-war transition into the CIA. We hope that we can host him again at CSUN for his expertise connects to a number of history seminars.

When we returned to our hotel, the Red Roof Inn in Chinatown, each day with our brains somewhat drained and overwhelmed, we met with Dr. Meyer for our "de-briefings." What have we accomplished? What did we find and how much more still needs research? What are our goals for the next day? We reviewed our topics, discussed methodologies, and exchanged idea. We became more focused and on target. We found it gratifying to